

The Elders cancel visit to Zimbabwe Meetings to continue in South Africa

Johannesburg, Saturday 22 November 2008

The Elders are cancelling their trip to Harare this weekend, saying the government of Zimbabwe has refused to cooperate in any way to make the visit possible.

The three members of the Elders' delegation are former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, former United States President Jimmy Carter and international advocate for women's and children's rights Mrs Graça Machel.

"We need no red carpet treatment from the government of Zimbabwe," said Mr Annan. "We seek no permission other than permission to help the poor and the desperate.

"However the refusal of the Zimbabwean government to facilitate our visit in any way has made it impossible for us to travel at this time," said Mr Annan.

"Millions of people are in need of help in Zimbabwe. We want to use our influence to increase the flow of assistance, immediately and in the longer term, to stop the terrible suffering. We are here to show solidarity with the people of Zimbabwe and to assure them that they are not alone."

"I am extremely disappointed that we are unable to visit Zimbabwe," said Mrs Machel. "We want to talk to people and hear their stories directly. We want people to know that we care, and that we will do all we can to help them. People are dying from hunger every day in Zimbabwe and hospitals are unable to treat the sick. With schools struggling to stay open, children are missing out on an education. One in four children has lost one or both parents. The government's attitude to our visit is deeply regrettable."

President Jimmy Carter, who actively supported Zimbabwe's liberation struggle while in office, said: "I am partisan. I make no apology for that. I supported Zimbabwe's liberation struggle and I oppose suffering and misery. But I am very sorry that we are unable to visit Zimbabwe. We will continue with our plans to learn as much as we can while we are here in the region, where millions of Zimbabweans inside and outside the country face a daily struggle for survival."

The Elders will remain in South Africa to brief themselves as fully as possible about the situation in Zimbabwe and neighbouring countries. They will speak to humanitarian agency representatives, civil society actors, businesspeople and officials from Zimbabwe, South Africa and the region.

Mr Annan said: "In preparation for the visit, I spoke to many regional leaders, who are all extremely concerned about the humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe and who welcome the Elders' visit in the expectation that it will make a real difference for the country and the region."



A press conference to present the Elders' findings will be held on Monday in Johannesburg as planned. Further details of the press conference will be released as soon as possible.

For more information please see www.theElders.org

Media contact: Katy Cronin +27 82 858 5923 katy.cronin@theElders.org